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Japan Food Trend

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Approved by:

Michael Conlon, Agricultural Trade Officer
U.S. Embassy

Prepared by:

Sumio Thomas Aoki, Senior Marketing Specialist

Report Highlights: The five senses (taste, sight, smell, hearing, touch) of the Japanese in respect to food is traditionally acquired through dining experiences and passed on from generation to generation. Food and the dining experience is central to Japanese etiquette and lifestyle. For marketers of food, an understanding and a keen sense of these five senses is essential to develop products for the Japanese market.

Note: This report will be sent to interested U.S. trade groups, U.S. legislators and State Departments of Agriculture.

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JAPAN FOOD TRENDS

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Editor's Notes

The chronicles of David Kamp in his book "The United States of Arugula" gives us a great insight into the U.S. food transformation. It explains why gourmet has become popular in America now. It includes a short passage describing the introduction of sushi to America and the success of Japanese chefs. Kamp also explains how one fusion recipe, avocado roll (California roll), was created in America and has since been exported to Japan and many other parts of the world.

Many Japanese order avocado rolls without knowing its origin, but they do know that the soft and smooth texture as well as the taste of avocado is similar to fatty tuna. This is an example of Japanese appreciation of food. You probably have heard other stories about Japanese appreciation of food and about the extensive attention the Japanese consumer pays to preparing, wrapping, presenting, eating food. This month's focus is on the five senses (taste, sight, smell, hearing, and touch) and Japanese preferences.

Trendy Products and Stores

1. **Internet Taste Evaluation** (Nihon Keizai Shimbun, Nov. 10, 2007 p13) introduced taste sensory technology to wine selection through the internet. Trading house, Mitsubishi Shoji, offered through their website www.azwine.jp a wine selection service for potential customers of this year's Beaujolais Nouveau. Customers responded to a questionnaire, which determined taste preferences based on a database of numerical indicators configured by using a taste sensor. The taste sensor developed by University of Kyushu scientists and marketed by a venture capital company, Taste and Aroma Strategic Research Institute, are planning to expand services to market other beverages and food items through the internet.

Japanese researchers developed a taste sensor that measures electrical currents to identify our five basic tastes. Infatuated about what they eat, now the Japanese will have a way to measure their taste pleasures.

2. **The Secret To Longevity: CSR** (Nikkei MJ, Nov. 21, 2007, p3)

CSR is not about corporate social responsibility. The reporter emphasizes the importance of three keywords for food branding success. They are 1) Colorful, 2) Self-regulation and 3) Research. [We discuss the first keyword, Colorful, in this newsletter]

Vegetable juice manufacturer, Kagome Co. Ltd. (<http://www.kagome.co.jp/english/index.html>), brightens the store shelves with printed packages with drawings of mixtures of colorful vegetables, which differentiate them from competitors. In addition to traditional vegetables used in vegetable juices such as tomato, carrot and celery, Kagome introduced purple carrots, yellow carrots and fruits to vary flavors and add color.

Tradeshows in Japan have constructed booths to focus on color segmentation in supermarkets and convenience stores to attract customers. Variation of colors helps product visibility, but it also offers store managers a method to brighten shelves and provide a fresh look for customers to visually enjoy.

3. Impact of New Black Vermicelli Soup, (Sankei Shimbun Nov. 18, 2007, p15)

Black is a boom color. High-class, healthy and different are the images projected from these “kuro” (black) products and consumers are in demand for more. Ezaki Glico Co. (<http://www.glico.co.jp/en/index.htm>), which is a confectionary and food manufacturer, developed a cup soup with black rice vermicelli. The concept of the product designers was to take advantage of the popular cup soup market and create a healthy soup in black. Black rice vermicelli is a creation of hijiki, which is a dark brown algae, pressed into clear vermicelli. The packaging of course is also black with a large and bold paint brushed *kanji* character that represents “kuro”.

Other black ingredients are black sesame, black beans, squid ink, etc

4. High Antioxidant Tomato (Nihon Keizai Shimbun, Dec. 6, 2007, p33)

A tomato that has 1.5 times more lycopene content compared to tomatoes presently on store shelves was introduced to the market by Kagome Co. Ltd. According to Nihon Keizai Shimbun, it is rare to market a produce based on the amount of a single nutrient.

As the color of tomatoes change from green to red, the content of lycopene increases as well. Perhaps we instinctively look for a ripe red tomato to get the nutrients for our body.

5. Vegetables Packaged Fresh In Cute and Fluffy Packaging (Nikkei MJ, Nov. 28, 2007, p18)

A vegetable package wins the “Good Design Special” Award. (<http://www.g-mark.org/search/Detail?id=33819&lang=en>heart of homemakers).



Mr. Gotoh produces baby leaves and other produces and spent 4 years designing a package that would keep his baby leaves fresh. The patented package is called Pattruss. According to the designer, “(p)attruss film creates a three-dimensional (four-sided) form that can withstand pressure to protect the products it contains. Opened at the center to remove the product inside, the unsealed packaging converts into a boat-shaped container that holds the original contents. Materials that serve as

both packaging and as a dish to hold the opened product offer consumers greater convenience. Although created from thin material, the product acts as a strong packaging material while also serving as a storage container. This dual use helps to conserve and recycle resources."

Mr. Gotoh was also pleased with an unpredicted bonus of the design, which was its popularity with the 20 and 30 year age women who loved the cute and fluffy packaging.

6. *Simpson Doughnuts Hit Japan*

In the last Japan Food Trend issue we introduced trendy doughnut shops. Here are a couple eye opening doughnuts that went on sale December 12, 2007 for a limited time from Mister Donuts. They are part of a promotional package for the new Simpsons movie.



Pink: Mixed Berry Flavor Yellow: Banana Flavor

In a rare tie-up of a movie production company and a doughnut shop in Japan, 20th Century Fox and Mister Donuts developed the real version of the donuts that appear in the movie.

In the previous Japan Food Trend issue we told you about the increasing usage of mobile phones. This is another example. Customers take pictures of the donuts with their phones, mail the pictures to the movie website (from the phones), and then receive an electronic coupon which they can redeem at the box office. --Anyone who is interested in the use of technology in marketing should be fascinated by this example.

These colorful donuts may be normal for American eyes, but it will be interesting to see the reactions of the Japanese Simpson fans.